

Linda Clair
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File 5c – Wednesday afternoon discussion session

Question: With the pain, when you're sitting and it's painful compared to what you've had in the past and what you consider your limit, is there a way to not suffer in it? (laughter) I mean the mental gymnastics where you're constantly thinking about the bell. Or if it's that intense, are you going to always have that? Or does it get to the point where you can just come back to the breath and even though you are suffering there's not the head thing going on?

Linda: It's a good question. In my experience, no. Sorry. You can tend to feel you're doing something wrong. That can be part of the whole mental thing, "I should be able to cope with this better, I should be able to have some sort of control over it," but, no. When it was incredibly intense like that all I could do was wait for the bell. There's no perfect way to be with it and when there is, it's gone – so, it goes.

You can try and be close to it and all that stuff theoretically, but when it's incredibly intense there's nothing you can do except sit with it and try not to look for a way out, a way to cope with it, except maybe a few little things like breathing. But it's not going to make it easier. It's going to feel, at times, almost unbearable, but you sit there. So it's totally up to you, nobody's making you sit there. You've got to see, "Well, I'm doing this voluntarily. I can get up or move whenever I feel to if it gets too much," and you can do that. And if you do, don't beat yourself about giving up, "Oh, I couldn't sit through," all that stuff.

So at different times it'll be the pain, or whatever you're feeling like the emotional stuff, will be at different intensities and there's no hard and fast rule about how to cope with it at any one time. You just have to do your best to sit with it – that's it. The suffering does come to an end eventually. But it's necessary, it's not pointless, you're not having a hard time for no reason. But you don't realise that until it's gone for good.

Question: I just want to talk about this brain electricity that I have and have talked to you about it. It gets strong and when I'm deeply in a retreat it gets stronger like right now. It's been going on for a few years, almost like shocks, energy pulsing. I'm not sure if I can feel the flutter of a thought. It's like seeing the brain separately. Just a lot of energy in the head.

Linda: I'm not sure what you mean about seeing the brain separately.

Question: It's like I feel there's this brain with electromagnetic pulses. And if my mind is the brain... It happens when I go deep, this feeling of electricity in the head. It's seeing it like a part of the body, whereas normally I'm not aware of the brain.

Linda: The mind is not the brain though.

Question: Yes, I know.

Linda: So you're seeing that the mind and the brain are not the same?

Question: Well, I just get a lot of impulse sensation.

Linda: In the head? (Yes.) I did too. Some people do, some people not so much. I know my teachers did. Can you describe it a little bit more?

Question: Right now it's all around the skull, the area in the back – it's all tingly. It's not unpleasant, it's not alike a headache. It happened that first night when I came. All the energy started turning in rather than out and I started to feel a lot of electricity, or that's how I describe it.

Linda: Do you ever get jolts?

Question: Yes, I'm always hopping. Not in the brain so much, it's the body.

Linda: Well, so much happens in the brain, a lot happens in the brain. It's almost like the brain is being purified of the mind and all the pathways are changing, from being incredibly crowded with thoughts and the past to becoming spacious, and minimal pathways. So things like that happen. You can get a lot of pain in there. I felt quite a bit in that area for years, but eventually it went. Your whole body changes. Your whole body becomes purified of the past and you get all sorts of different sensations, experiences happening. I think I do remember feeling that, what you're describing as well.

Question: This is when I go, "Be grounded, be grounded."

Linda: Just be grounded. Even though stuff is happening out there, don't push it away. Just feel it but ground yourself. Try not to analyse it too much, examine it too much. Don't be scared, you won't have a stroke or whatever. It's quite a normal thing.

Question: Yes, even the long sits and the pain, it's a similar thing. The past or the habits are just being torn away.

Linda: Yes. And because they've been there for so long, that personal past, it takes a lot to really become free from them, for them to dissolve, those very deep habits of being you.

Question: Yes, I can see why the pain is important in that sense.

Linda: It is. I don't like going on about it too much because you can tend to go, "Oh, I don't feel that so there's something wrong," but it can be a very important part of it. It's forcing the past out of your body, and particularly your brain.

Question: I know about that electricity in the brain. For myself, I wouldn't really call it electricity. I get like a tree full of cicadas. I can hear it and it's buzzy. It's like your nerves are screeching at a very high frequency. This happens almost every time I meditate. I call it stabilizing. I hear that and I feel myself in my body and the breathing becomes very rhythmic. I feel I'm enclosed in a darker space

with very little thought and ego. I call it stabilizing. I can just sit there for the next forty minutes, just there. Thoughts come and go but not strong enough to pull you out of it. It's real buzzy.

Linda: Is it mostly in your head you feel it?

Question: The buzzy-ness, definitely. It's like tinnitus or a tree full of cicadas, stabilizing my body in the present. It's been like that for quite a long time.

Linda: Be careful you don't get attached to that though. So be very aware of what's going on outside you and don't put yourself in this bubble of, in a way, comfort, this comfort zone that you're in. Because that will prevent you from delving deeper in, and allowing other things to come in. So be very open to sensations, sounds. Really watch that expectation that that's going to happen, because you can get into that habit of going, "Oh yes, this is what's going to happen during my sit," and become quite attached to that, and, "Oh, yes, this is what's going to happen," and it does happen. You sort of become comfortable with it because you know what's going to happen.

So I would say, change something. Or allow something to change rather than trying to change something, just allow something to change. Don't put yourself in this bubble. So when you're at home change the times that you're sitting, sometimes to sit for half an hour, sometimes longer. How are you sitting? (On a cushion.)

I think you need to watch it very carefully because there's this subtle, habitual thinking coming in. You can tend to stagnate in that. The sounds that you're hearing – yes, that happens. It's very strong and a lot of people can feel that and hear that. It's almost like the sound of silence. But then you need to let it go and be a bit more open to something else happening.

Question: Sometimes it feels like I'm going to go a bit deeper.

Linda: Yes. Are you breathing down here? (Yes.) Are you sitting for half an hour and then getting up. (Usually about forty-five minutes straight.) What about here? Are sitting through at all? (Yes.) And it's the same thing?

Question: No, here it's been different. I was all over the place for a few days. My mind was just crazy for a couple of days but it started to stabilise. Yesterday I had a couple of very nice experiences that were more than I've experienced before so it gave me a little bit of hope that maybe I can continue further.

Linda: So see what happens the next few days. But at home I'd say change things around a bit, don't do things exactly the same every day. And when you're not sitting be very aware of your body. Are you still working? (Yes.) So even at work be very aware of what you're doing.

Question: I sit and sort of meditate on the bus. And a few minutes here and there at work. I'll mix things up.

Linda: Be very open to whatever's happening. And even if your mind is crazy don't try and contain it. Stabilise yourself in your body and let that stuff happen but be able to cope with it.

Question: It's not like I try to maintain that. It's just what happens.

Linda: There's probably a subtle habitual thing about it. So this retreat might change everything.

Question: You were saying this morning that some people may be looking forward to the end of the retreat and others no. So I was thinking, how do I feel about that? There's only so long you want to stay in a pressure cooker so it's probably good when the end comes. As I was thinking that, I said inside, "I don't want to go home, I hate my life." I was shocked to hear that because I never thought of that before. So I had a bit of a meltdown at lunchtime over it and I've been thinking about what that means. I've been thinking my life is pretty good, there's nothing wrong with it. But since I met you I've sort of caught on fire and, not that my life is a waste of time, but I feel that coming to a retreat is a refuge from my mind. Or since I've been experiencing more peace there's now a craving for it. I find myself scouring the internet for other retreats to do. And I've been doing a lot more retreats aside from coming here – not as long as this one – two days and three days. I feel there's something not quite right about that. First, S. and I don't see each other much during the week; the weekend is the only time we have to see each other and then I go away, and I've been doing that quite a bit lately. And I leave him to eat a bag of peanuts for lunch and dinner. (laughter)

But it feels that a mind-based part of me is running the show and leaving me a bit jagged. And yet when I come back from a retreat like this I put all sorts of things in place: I'm going to get up early, and every hour I'm going to watch my breath for a few minutes. But after three weeks it's all gone by the wayside. What puzzles me is that in spite of having this fire I don't have the discipline unless I go somewhere and do nothing-but for two or three days or a week or whatever. I don't know what to make of it.

Linda: It's quite a common problem. Straight after a retreat people are really fired up and then it starts to diminish a bit. You can just do what you do. I would say don't run around doing a whole lot of different ones. What sort of retreats are you doing?

Question: I was at a Buddhist centre two weeks ago. I did a retreat with the hugging mother, she was really good. There's a bit of sense of checking them out to see if they're good. Sometimes they give instructions and I just count my breath instead. It's just making space in my life to do that. But it feels like I should surrender the impatience, maybe. I think there's a fear that if I don't do it fast enough I'm never going to get there. And again, the worry, if I had the discipline at home – I meditate in the morning but...

Linda: How long?

Question: Usually during the week, half an hour to forty-five minutes, and an hour on the weekends.

Linda: That's fine. Do that.

Question: It doesn't feel like enough, nothing does.

Linda: Well, if you want to do more, do more. But you do need to be patient. It needs to be urgent in a way but you need to be patient as well. I was saying to someone the other day that you'll get as much time as you need, *if* you put it first. So you do need to put it first, which doesn't necessarily mean that you meditate for three hours a day.

I wouldn't run around too much going to a whole lot of different ones. If you want check out a few people, retreats – but you can become a bit scattered, a bit confused – and you feel a bit weird not spending the weekends with S. It needs to be reasonably balanced. But I think things will settle down. Things will be okay, things will settle down, because you're pretty busy at work. Maybe, if you can, just do a short sit in the evening, fifteen minutes if you're not too tired, or in the middle of the day if you have time between appointments.

Question: I have time but I find it very hard to let go of the role my mind is in during the day.

Linda: Well, it will really help if you can stop during the day, it will stop that momentum, even if it's just for five minutes.

Question: That's where I find myself judging myself because I come back from here and I have all these intentions and then it feels so hard to stop the role during the day. But when I come back from a retreat I have the energy to do it but it's a like a wave that gets you after a while. I'll say I'll do five minutes then I don't end up doing it. But I think the evening is more manageable.

Linda: So find a manageable time and do it. Do you sit together? (In the morning, yes.) Nice.

Question: But it feels right to hear that it will settle down.

Linda: I feel like it will settle down.

Question: I think there's a sense of urgency because for years I haven't done much. I feel I was plateauing, there was no one that inspired me. And now that I've found you I couldn't wait to get on with it. But just stay around, please. (laughter)

Linda: I probably will.

Question: After I told you about the changes that were happening, this huge weight lifted off, it was really distinct. I don't understand that with my mind. The next couple of days I felt really light in my body. So the whole retreat was really different for me. At first I thought it's because I've had back-to-back viruses and I just need to rest. But my energy wanted to go in a different way, like picking up the chairs to sweep. I thought I couldn't pick them up, but I moved from a different place. I felt very tender toward myself and loving to everyone here. Somehow that was a big burden and speaking it out loud shifted something. So thank you. And my three years are up and I want to know what to do now. (laughter)

Linda: So will I see you again? (laughing)

Question: I had a weird feeling. I said to T., "I think this is my last one!" So even though I was really sick I said, "No, I've got to come." But also because it's been so tough, the three-year thing got me through some of those patches. (laughter) But it's been really full on! That's a good thing but for me it's really arduous.

Linda: Yes, it is.

Question: But I think that was part of that lightness. My thick layer of resistance was knocked out by the virus. So it was very spacious, lovely actually. Like not sleeping but just lying there within myself, very peaceful. And wanting to be in this room a lot, whereas normally I walk and write things and look at my phone. I just wanted to be here. What about what next? (laughing) Do I need to another three weeks, three months, three years?

Linda: Yes. You need to be *prepared* to do that. Byron Bay might be a challenge.

Question: One of the reasons that was so hard is that I hate Byron Bay. (laughter) I have terrible judgements about life out there.

Linda: Might be good for you.

Linda: How are you S.? You look a bit exhausted or sick?

Question: No, I'm not sick, not this time. I've just been seeing stuff about myself that's not so great. The "smart ass" in me I've been seeing is a bit annoying. It's humbling to see that, like to make a funny comment or something, getting attention and then not really wanting it. The first two days were really tough, the thoughts going round and round. Then I decided after listening to R. about the five-thirty sit – I did that this morning. It was amazing, I actually did it, I actually managed to stay there. Except right at the end I could feel almost a panic attack, but did very deep breathing and managed to stay there and came through. So yes, I've been quieter this time, but not sick. I'm taking better care of myself and cut back from the work.

Linda: Oh, good.